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The Need to Update Space Planning Policies for the California Community Colleges

California plans its development of public higher education facilities using policies called “space and utilization” guidelines and standards. These are budgetary planning tools that can measure existing and future need for academic spaces such as classrooms, laboratories, research space, and faculty offices. California’s current space and utilization standards were originally adopted in 1966 and amended in 1971 and 1973. In 1990, the Commission conducted its first comprehensive study and report on the standards, entitled *A Capacity for Learning*. That report proposed significant recommendations based on how changes in teaching and research practices had affected space requirements. Table 1 below summarizes the conclusions and recommendations from the report.

TABLE 1 Summary of Major Conclusions and Recommendations from the CPEC report, *A Capacity for Learning*

- I. General recommendations:** simplify the standards wherever possible and apply them campus-wide, not to individual projects; require biennial segmental reports on space use; establish a permanent CPEC space/use standards advisory committee.
- II. Classrooms:** slightly relax classroom utilization standards, but continue them as being among the most stringent in the nation; maintain an Assignable Square Footage (ASF-per-station) standard; provide for storage space in CCCs.
- III. Teaching Labs:** institute a single use standard for lower and upper-division; set standards for five laboratory types, a dramatic reduction from the individual standards for several dozen disciplines; allow minor increase in storage space (2-4%) in all three systems.
- IV. Research space:** establish guidelines for six laboratory types and allocate space for only “primary” researchers – State-funded faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows; set space/use guidelines near national norms and in conformity with recent practice, including office space for graduate students.
- V. Faculty offices:** improve office space for CCCs by 58%, for CSU by 14.3%, and for UC by 9.4%; the CCCs had minimal formula space for offices and other functions in the 1966 CCHE space standards.

This fact sheet highlights the specific needs of California’s community colleges. State and local administrative regulations such as local building codes and Fire, Life, and Safety (FLS) requirements have substantially increased since the old standards were adopted. In addition, federal regulations – Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) enacted in 1990 – have changed space requirements in all public facilities in ways not recognized in the State’s 1970s-era space policies.

As advancements have been made in FLS technologies and understandings, local fire marshals now require community college buildings to have additional fire panels, fire sprinklers, and fire hydrants. Local codes also require buildings to have updated water pressure capacity, meaning many colleges must install their own pumping equipment. After the 1994 Northridge earthquake, California strengthened its seismic safety codes and increased structural system designs. However, California’s space standards for public colleges and universities do not take any of the recent mandates into account, thus creating space “deficits” in many areas of college operations.

In addition to new FLS requirements, the ADA brought with it numerous building and renovation requirements for community colleges. These include appropriately sloped ramps, electric power for doors, additional and special hardware, guard rails/hand rails, wider and more navigable walking surfaces and wider

doors. For classrooms, class labs and other academic facilities, ADA-required changes include increased chair lifts and elevators, special lighting and modified classroom facilities, special seating, modified lavatory fixtures and stalls, specially designed sinks, and modified class lab workstations.

Out of date funding formulas undermine the colleges' ability to meet the new requirements. Community college districts are not funded for the increased space required to meet code requirements because the state's cost guidelines that drive capital project funding are based on the old Title 5 space standards which were developed prior to the enactment of the Disability Act and increased FLS requirements. The need for community college districts to build to current code requirements has often left districts unable to construct projects within the capital construction funds provided at the current cost standards. While the cost guidelines are generally adjusted for inflation, they do not include the items described above that are required features in today's new buildings.

In addition, the 1970s space standards do not provide sufficient office space for community college faculty, given their increased responsibilities in curricular development, student counseling, and other professional activities. The standards allot no space for part-time community college faculty, even though these faculty represent a large portion of college staff and perform most of the same duties as full-time faculty. The standards also do not recognize the evolution of distance education and the unique space needs of staff and faculty to conduct off-site instruction from campus facilities.

Equally critical is the capacity to utilize technology on campus. California's early 1970s higher education space standards did not envision the technological advances required to support today's educational environment in the colleges. The old standards do not provide for current and future technology infrastructure.

Campus functionality also suffers from the State's antiquated space standards. Contemporary design, construction, and renovation techniques substantially lengthen building life and utility when they are incorporated into space planning policies. The 1970s standards provide no way to incorporate in design or construction "Green Building" (environmentally efficient) goals, nor do they facilitate other "smart building" technologies that have been developed over the past few decades. Space requirements for something as simple as a janitor's closet have changed substantially since 1973. Increased space is now needed to accommodate modern-day cleaning and building maintenance equipment that had not even been invented when the current space standards were developed.

Conclusion

The State's current space and utilization standards are no longer appropriate or realistic for determining the need for physical space in California's community colleges. Flexible space and utilization guidelines in public postsecondary institutions would provide the most efficient and effective approach for meeting the evolving needs of academic programs, and for best facilitating the progress of students through the State's colleges and universities. The combination of modern space allocation and utilization policies and contemporary building techniques would increase the efficiency and sustainability of community colleges and actually lessen capital outlay costs over time.

Recent legislative efforts indicate that State policy makers understand the direction that higher education space planning must take in order for California's public colleges and universities to effectively educate the nearly three million students they serve.